

Introductory

Mark continues to relate to us the events immediately following the Transfiguration, things that are mostly contained also, and in much the same form, in Matthew and Luke. In the first part of this reading, Jesus talks about going to Jerusalem to be rejected, killed, and rise. This is the second time – the first time was 8:31ff – that Mark records Jesus talking like that, and He will say the same thing once more, in 10:32ff.

Matthew and Luke also record that three times Jesus talked like that. Matthew throws in the account of the shekel in the fish's mouth (17:24-27) right here, an incident not thrown in by Mark and Luke. The second part of the reading is the infamous account of the disciples discussing among themselves who is the greatest in the Kingdom, prompting Jesus to teach, first by using an oxymoron, and then famously securing a child, and using that child to teach the adults about the Kingdom. The Matthew parallel is found in 17:22 – 18:5, and in Luke 9:43-48.

In TLH, none of the three times that Jesus spoke of His coming death and Resurrection, recorded three times each by each of the three synoptic writers, for a total of nine mentions in the NT, are ever appointed to be read. Matthew 18:1-11 is appointed by TLH to be read on St. Michael Day. In LW, today's text from Mark is read on Pentecost 18B, and in LSB, Matthew 18:1-20 is read on Proper 18A.

This death talk is bad news for these men, and they take it hard, but not as hard as they had the first time. The first time Jesus told these men what was awaiting Him in Jerusalem, they sort of freaked out, Peter actually rebuked Jesus for talking that way, and that's when Jesus called him "Satan" and told him to get back in his lane. This time, they still find such talk to be unsettling, but none of them says anything about it, and by the third time they seem to have come to grips with what was ahead.

In the eighth chapter of Mark (v. 27), we find Jesus at Caesarea Philippi, and there Peter made his Great Confession. Mark next relates that Jesus then, for the first time, talks about death and resurrection, and then, "after six days," the Transfiguration, and the healing of the demoniac boy, which brings us to today's text. Depending on where you locate the Mount of Transfiguration, they were approaching their destination, which we later find to be Capernaum (v.33), from the north or from the south.

Textual Notes

30. Fresh on the heels of healing the demoniac boy, Mark tells us that they went “Κάκειῖθεν ἐξελθόντες παρεπορεύοντο διὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας – from there, having left, they passed through Galilee.” Matthew (17:22) has them “ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ – in Galilee.” Mt. Hermon is north of Capernaum, currently located in the Golan Heights, on the border between Lebanon and Syria. Mt. Tabor is south and west of the Sea of Galilee.

Coming from either possible location of the Transfiguration to Capernaum, one could find oneself “in Galilee.” Coming from Tabor, the shortest route to Capernaum would lead directly through Galilee. Coming from Hermon, one would be skirting the eastern “border” of Galilee, but since Galilee is a region, it really didn’t have fixed borders, no more than the Midwest has fixed borders.

When Mark tells us that “καὶ οὐκ ἤθελεν ἵνα τις γνοῖ - He did not want that anyone should know it,” about what is he speaking? That becomes clear in the next verse, where we are told that He is teaching His disciples about His Crucifixion and Resurrection. That verse also tells us that these same disciples did not understand His talk about those things. As a practical matter, it seems unlikely that these men would talk about things they don’t understand.

31. As they traveled, Jesus “ἐδίδασκεν γὰρ τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ - He was teaching His disciples.” That verb, “to teach” is in the imperfect tense, meaning continuous action, and the “disciples - μαθητάς” do what μαθητάς by definition do; they were learning. And “ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι Ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδοται εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων – He was saying to them that the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men.”

The verb παραδίδοται, here rendered “is delivered,” is a present tense form of παραδίδωμι, and it is here followed by the preposition “εἰς,” followed by a noun (hands) in the accusative case, meaning that He is what “being handed over” to men. The KJV (1611) the ASV (1901) both correctly have the verb for “hand over” in the present tense, as do the NKJV and AKJV, affiliate versions of KJV. The rest wrongly make it into a future tense; “will be handed over.”

The present tense of that verb indicates that the thing of which He speaks is imminent, and that even as He speaks, the wheels are already in motion for this handing over to take place. We are not told exactly when Judas struck the deal, but from this saying of Jesus we may with some degree of certainty conclude that Judas has already entered into at least preliminary discussions with those who will pay him for The Kiss.

In John 6:64, at a time which is almost certainly prior to what is going on in this text (depending on how you view the chronology of John), Jesus Himself had revealed His knowledge that one of them would betray Him. We ought not to get the idea that Judas just came up with the betrayal idea overnight. That’s not the kind of thing that one does in haste, but only after much time and thoughtful deliberation.

And after talking about His delivery in the present tense, now we actually have Jesus talking about the future, using the future tenses of two verbs – with an aorist sandwiched in between – to say that two things are coming up; “ἀποκτενοῦσιν αὐτόν, καὶ ἀποκτανθεὶς μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστήσεται – they will kill Him, and having been killed, after three days He will rise.”

Twice in that sentence, Mark uses the verb “to kill,” to emphasize that He was really going to be killed dead. It sort of reminds you of that scene in the movie *Unforgiven*, right after The Schofield Kid had killed Quick Mike, who was in the outhouse, and The Schofield Kid says to Will Munny, “I killed him. I killed him good.”

In like manner, those who killed Jesus thought that they had “killed Him good,” but as it turns out, not good enough. Jesus rose from the dead, and as is almost always the case, whenever He talks about His death, He talks about His Resurrection. In like manner, when the Preacher talks about the death of Jesus, He ought to talk also about the Resurrection.

32. Mark tells us that the disciples, surprisingly, upon hearing such talk, “οἱ δὲ ἠγνόουν τὸ ῥῆμα, καὶ ἐφοβοῦντο αὐτὸν ἐπερωτῆσαι – did not know the saying, and they were afraid to ask Him.” All of the English translations that I’m looking at have these men not “understanding” It’s worse than that. The verb “ἀγνοέω” does not refer to a lack of understanding, but instead to a total and complete ignorance of what is going on. How can that be?

As has been mentioned here before on other occasions, sometimes, to understand what’s going on with these men, we have to walk a mile in their shoes, maybe even two. For us, the idea of Jesus dying and rising from the dead is old hat, a very familiar thing, in fact foundational to our religion. For them, it was clearly something of a novel idea, and one that was just as clearly hard for them to swallow.

They did not know what the man was talking about, and moreover they were “ἐφοβοῦντο αὐτόν ἐπερωτῆσαι - afraid to ask” Him. The verb “to fear” in the imperfect tense indicates an ongoing fear of what might happen if they ask Jesus about what He had just said. Of what were they afraid? Well, of what are you afraid when you are thinking of asking a question of the teacher?

It’s almost as if these men had been with Jesus for many months, and they have seen and heard much, but when it comes to the fundamental meaning of the Life of Jesus, they are clueless. They are in that way precursors to the American Christians who see and hear much about Jesus, but are likewise ignorant of the fundamental meaning of death and resurrection.

33. Galilee is a region, and now on to His old stomping grounds, on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, “Καὶ ἦλθον εἰς Καφαρναούμ. Καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ – and they came into Capernaum, and in the house.” We note here the presence of the definite article “τῇ οἰκίᾳ – the house,” not “a house.” Perhaps there was a particular house that served as a sort of headquarters for Jesus Ministries – Galilee Division.

And “γενόμενος ἐπηρώτα αὐτοὺς Τί ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ διελογίζεσθε – having been, He asked them ‘what on the way you were discussing?’” The verb is the verb of the genesis of being, a rather curious choice. It emphasizes that Jesus did not ask this question until they were in the house, i.e. in private, not in public. In the manner of all travelers of all times and all places, the followers of Jesus, while they were moving from one place to another, passed the time by talking.

They were not engaged in small talk, but they were discussing some pretty heady subject matter. The verb used to describe the manner of their talking is διαλογίζομαι,” a word that means some pretty serious cognitive activity, and the imperfect tense indicates that their discussion on the road was ongoing rather than one-time. Just think of a group of pastors over lunch at the Winkel to get an idea of what sort of conversation went on during their just-ended journey.

If you have ever been the parent of children, then you have hauled children around in a vehicle. If you have ever been a parent of children, you have been amazed at some of the things that come out of their mouths during the process of hauling. Sometimes it’s almost like they have forgotten that the adult is in the vehicle, and that the adult can hear every word exchanged, because the “permission to speak freely” order is almost always in order during these rides, and they speak freely about things they would never talk about to the parent.

Apparently the disciples forgot that Jesus was in the car, and that He would hear every word that they said during this journey. And “ἐπηρώτα – He was asking.” This is another strong word for some serious questioning, and the translations that say that He was “interrogating” do well. The word itself speaks of confrontation, and the verb is in the imperfect tense, meaning that Jesus asked them repeatedly what they were talking about.

It’s not a difficult question He asks, and if you are asking the children repeatedly what they have been talking about, that means that they did not sufficiently answer the first time or all preceding times when they have been asked. It is noteworthy that Jesus had just told them about His upcoming death and resurrection, which is a subject worthy of much discussion, but that’s not at all what they’re talking about.

34. Their response to the question of Jesus is “οἱ δὲ ἐσιώπων· πρὸς ἀλλήλους γὰρ διελέχθησαν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ τίς μείζων – They were silent, because with one another they had been discussing on the road who is the greater.” In the manner of children who have been called out by the parent, they didn’t want to tell Jesus what they had been talking about. When you walk into a room and everybody stops talking, what were they talking about?

When your teenage daughter, who is in her room, with the door shut, talking to a friend, and she hears you outside the door, and stops talking, what were they talking about? When you are talking to your wife – or husband (we have women readers, who are not pastors – well, at least not that I know of) – about something personal or maybe embarrassing, and you hear the kids coming, why do you go silent?

Jesus asked them about what they were talking, “but they were silent – ἐσιώπων.” Put this imperfect tense of the verb “to be silent” with the imperfect tense verb above “ἐπηρώτα – He was asking,” and you get a picture of the parent asking the children repeatedly what they were talking about, and none of the children wants to be the first to break; mum’s the word. Mark tells us the reason why they were silent; “they had been discussing along the road who was greater.”

If you have ever been a parent, then you know that when the child doesn’t want to tell you what they were talking about, it’s because they know that what they were talking about is wrong. The adjective is the comparative (greater - μείζων), not the superlative (greatest - μέγας). So pretty much every translation you’re looking at – they all have the superlative “greatest” – is wrong. At first glance, we may ask, what’s the difference?

The difference is that none of them is making the claim to be the *greatest*, but at least some of them, and likely all of them, are making the claim to a certain *degree* of greatness, probably compared to the others of the group. It’s what men do, anytime there is any occasion for any sort of competition; they want to be better, stronger, faster, or smarter, than the rest of the group.

There was no likely much tooting of one’s own horn, but that doesn’t mean that some weren’t lobbying for the greatness of others. One of them may have been pushing for one of his homes to be considered greater than the others, and most certainly homes were representing for their – what do you call the guy for whom the homes are the homes?

35. And “καὶ καθίσας ἐφώνησεν τοὺς δώδεκα καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς – having sat down, He called the Twelve, and He says to them...” When I teach, I stand. In those days, when the Rabbi sits, it means that He has assumed the teaching position, and that classroom instruction is about to take place. The teacher is about to instruct the His disciples.

The first verb in the sentence, the one that I have translated “called,” if you look at the forty-two other occurrences of the verb “φωνέω – to make a sound,” it is used to describe one calling to another as sort of a summons, like when your mother used to “call” you to come in for supper. The verb also has connotations of a raised voice, like your mother’s always was.

And in what must be a summary of the teaching of Jesus, the teacher talks to the students using the well-known oxymoron, “Εἴ τις θέλει πρῶτος εἶναι, ἔσται πάντων ἔσχατος καὶ πάντων διάκονος – If anyone wants to be first, he will be last of all, and a servant of all.” Do not agonize over the meaning of that phrase, like many agonize over the meaning of that phrase, but simply call it what it is, an “oxymoron,” and move on. Perhaps give an example of another oxymoron.

We might also note that Jesus is the subject of the oxymoron. He is the first, but He will become the last, and a servant of all. He has, in fact, just told them that, relating to them the upcoming events that will take place in Jerusalem. To review, Jesus is talking about His Crucifixion and Resurrection, and the Twelve are talking about which of them is greater.

36. And then, in a move that must have driven the Anabaptists nuts, He takes a child, and He uses that child for an object lesson. You may or may not remember that I am against the use of objects for children under the age of twelve, or thereabouts, because their minds are unable to process the abstraction. But for adults, object lessons are often helpful – and this is why the adults “get more out of those children’s sermons than the children do. (JH)”

The Greek language, like the English language, has words other than “child” that more specifically identify the age of a child, but here the noun translated “child” is “παιδίον,” the general Greek word for youngsters. We do not know the specific age of the child, and since the neuter form is used in the one noun and two pronouns referring to it, nor do we know the gender.

And then “ἔστησεν αὐτὸ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν – He placed it in the midst of them.” The verb “placed” indicates location, not posture, and does not tell us if the child was sitting or standing or standing on its head. Probably it was not standing on its head. The verb “ἐναγκαλίζομαι” means literally “to take in one’s arms” and it means that He embraced or hugged the child.

The picture being painted here is one of these twelve grown men, men who were just now rather full of themselves, in the manner of many, but not all, recent seminary graduates, competing to determine who was a better follower of Jesus than whom, forced now to look at and center their attention on this child. And He “εἶπεν – He said” to them...

37. “Ὃς ἂν ἐν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων δέξηται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐμὲ δέχεται – whoever, in any case, should receive one child like this in my name, receives me.” Grammatically, the author pulls out all the stops here to emphasize the conditional nature, i.e. that there is the distinct possibility that what He is about to say will not happen, that the child will not be received.

That conditional phrase contains the relative pronoun “ὅς – whoever,” then the particle “ἔάν,” here used as “a conditional particle expressing possibility, based on a preexisting condition” (biblos.com), and finally the subjunctive (conditional) verb “δέχεται.” We note that, in fact, not all churches receive the children, but some absolutely refuse to baptize them.

This is the first time that the phrase “- ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι μου – in my name” appears in Mark, but it appears several times right after this, in reference to people casting out demons “in your name” and Jesus talking about those who do good works “in my name” and when He talks (41) about those who give a cup of water to the Apostles, He uses a very similar phrase, “ἐν ὀνόματι ὅτι Χριστοῦ ἐστε.- because of the name of Christ,” they will be rewarded.

When He talks about receiving them “in my name” he is talking about the apostles working in the Apostolic Office, and by extension, He is talking about pastors working in the Apostolic Office. He is talking particularly about children being baptized ordinarily by people who hold that Apostolic Office “in the name” of the Triune God.

The conditional here, the wild card, is whether or not the adult Christians will receive the Christian children. The base meaning here is clear; when you adult Christians receive a Christian child, you are receiving Jesus. It is the same sort of language that Jesus uses in other places to talk to these very men about those who receive their ministry, when He says to them that those who receive you receive me, and those who reject you reject me.

We get the idea here that Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, just like the song says. He then takes it one step further, using the same conditional sentence structure to remind them from whence He comes, and reminding them that rejection of Him is rejection not of Him, but of “the one who sent me.” Bottom line, to reject and to not receive children is to reject and to not receive the Father.

This sounds like pretty serious business, and it makes me wonder anew why the Lutherans are so uncritical – and I have heard LCMS pastors praising them – of the Anabaptists, who refuse Baptism to children as infants, and even when they are old enough to themselves desire Baptism, thereby denying to them one of the means by which God works in them.

We have come a long way, haven’t we, from just a couple of verses ago, when these men were talking among themselves about their own greatness, and Jesus overheard them, to this teachable moment that has Jesus talking about whether or not the adult Christians will receive the Christian children. In the end, He does not really speak explicitly to the question of “greatness,” but by doing what He did, taking the child and saying what He does about the child, He speaks very subtly, very creatively, and very clearly to the issue of greatness.

Good preaching does that, and Jesus was a very good preacher.

Law/Gospel

Death/Resurrection – He dies, and then He rises. We die, and we will rise. See Baptism and Romans 6 for the application of those things to the modern Christian.

Humility/Exaltation – He humbles Himself, even to the cross, and He at His Resurrection (and Ascension) He is exalted. Christians are humbled by the knowledge of their sin, and the suffering that comes with it, and look forward to our final exaltation.

Great/Great – The world has a different view of greatness, and we constantly have that view foisted upon us. True greatness lies in going to heaven for eternity, and living life with that knowledge in the here and now.

Father/Father – Our earthly fathers are imperfect, and love us only imperfectly, and we who are fathers are aware of our own shortcomings. We have a heavenly Father who is holy and perfect,

and who loves us so much that He sends the Son to save us, and in Baptism, through Mother Church, attaches us to His Family.

Child/Child – See above, only substitute us as imperfect children, for whom the Perfect Son dies, so that we are reckoned by the Father to be His perfect children.

Sermon Titles

To Die and Live in Jerusalem

Who is Greater?

Ranking the Apostles

Jesus and Children

Are You a Child?

Hymns

Father Welcomes – LSB 605

Jesus Loves the Little Children – Internet

Pick children's songs that the children know, and that the adults also know. If the children know different songs from the songs that the adults learned as children, maybe it's time to take a look at which songs the children are learning; are they Lutheran or are they Reformed?

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, IA

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Mark). Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. Translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark.. The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, Fundamental Greek Grammar. Concordia Publishing House, 1993

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, A Concordance to the Greek Testament. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Oxford University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html